

edward johnson building
faculty of music
university of toronto



ORFORD STRING QUARTET

QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE

ANDREW DAWES, Violin

TERENCE HELMER, Viola

KENNETH PERKINS, Violin

MARCEL ST-CYR, cello

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1979

3 P.M.

WALTER HALL

P R O G R A M

String Quartet in B flat, op. 76, No. 4

Franz Joseph Haydn

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Menuetto and Trio

Finale; Allegro ma non troppo

Haydn composed the six opus 76 quartets between 1797 and 1798, during which time he was also occupied with the composition of The Creation. Having completed his last (London) symphonies, he turned predominantly to large scale vocal works during this last period of his life. Opus 76 is his penultimate expression in the quartet medium, culminating forty years of experience. Having brought the string quartet to its position as a primary medium of chamber music, both as an ensemble and as a compositional form, these final quartets bear witness to the mastery of technique and form achieved by Haydn.

The fourth of these Erody String Quartets is nicknamed "The Sunrise", an evocation arising from the first violin's poignant opening ascent above the sustained harmonies in the first movement. A descending cello line marks a second subject area of similar affection. Throughout the movement this poignant lyricism is juxtaposed with the energy of motivic fragments and diverse textures, molding it into a varied yet integrated whole. The extremely slow Adagio movement extends the poignancy suggested in the first movement to the level of deep introspection. This telescoped sonata form movement has a depth and dimension to which late Beethoven is certainly indebted. This profundity is quickly forgotten in the folk-like strains of the following minuet with its stuttering phrases and plodding accents. A drone-like accompaniment in the trio is more suggestive of the countryside than the stately ballroom. Despite his formal innovations in the final movements of earlier works, Haydn returns to a more basic rondo structure in this late quartet. However, neither his invention nor his capriciousness can be stifled: in the long coda, the tempo is twice accelerated so that the movement ends, amid various hiccups and skirmishes, with a strong and robust piu presto.

Quartet

John Beckwith

Commissioned by the Orford String Quartet on a grant from the Canada Council, the Quartet was composed in 1977. It was first performed in February of 1978 by the Orford Quartet in Montreal. Although this is the first string quartet written by John Beckwith, he has previous experience in string ensemble writing in the Studies for String Trio (1955-6), Circle, with Tangents for harpsichord and thirteen solo strings (1967), Musical Chairs for string quartet with double bass (1973) and other works as well. Commenting on this first acquaintance with the traditional quartet medium, the composer writes: "I readily appreciated, in working on it, why it has held its appeal and challenge for composers over such a long time."

Characteristic of this important Canadian composer, regional influences appear in the work. Evocations of string sounds of the earlier epochs and more rural areas of central Canada such as the ukelele, mandoline and fiddle are heard in the Quartet. The two violinists occasionally share a third instrument, which is tuned in scordatura to provide open-string colours on unusual pitches. In a sense the whole work is freely variational, composed in five main structural sections played with almost no break between them. It is based on a note-series and related scales and chords, with the note-series often presented in forms emphasizing the open strings of the ensemble. The composer offers the following outline for listeners:

Part one is a short introduction, of rapidly changing colours. Part two consists of three variations, showing some of the 'folklike' sounds mentioned. Part three is a long-sustained melody presented first unmuted by the viola while the other instruments weave canonic muted free lines around it; in a second verse, the same long melody in different form is presented by the second violin and later taken over by the cello, while the rest of the quartet again entwines various muted comments' finally, a third verse combines the previous two, in pairs of non-muted instruments, always set against muted echoes in the remaining pair, and there is a short end-section, rather

inconclusive in feeling. Part four is a brief transition, juxtaposing scales and chord-figures previously heard. In part five, a 'fiddle-tune' is played simultaneously with ideas of a more personal and urgent expression. After two 'verses', the first in the straight violin and the second in the differently-tuned one, these verses are combined. Reminiscences of some phrases from parts one and three are heard just before the end.

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Quartet No. I in D major, Op. 11

P.I. Tchaikovsky

Moderato e semplice

Andante cantabile

Allegro non tanto e con fuoco

Allegro giusto

This is the first of Tchaikovsky's three string quartets, and was composed in 1871, following the second version of Romeo and Juliet, and briefly interrupting his work on the opera - The Oprichnik. 1871 found Tchaikovsky in serious financial difficulties. In order to alleviate the situation, Nicholas Rubenstein suggested a concert to promote his compositions. Although a symphonic program automatically came to mind, a chamber concert was arranged for economic reasons. However, outside of a number of miscellaneous chamber ensemble movements, Tchaikovsky, at 31, had written no chamber music. Since a concert of piano music and songs was not considered substantial enough, Tchaikovsky embarked on the composition of a string quartet. Composed within the month of February, it was premiered at the concert in March, 1871. As compared to the numerous revisions of Romeo and Juliet, dating from 1869 to 1880, the D major quartet was composed in a very short period of time. However, neither the haste of composition nor Tchaikovsky's lack of experience in the medium is revealed in this quartet.

A rich, full sonority opens the first sonata form movement. This initial, syncopated theme, with its chordal texture, is then contrasted with a largemente flowing melody in A major. After combining the two ideas in the development, the tonic is again established

and the syncopated theme returns, now accompanied by scalewise runs in the violin.

Although considered outside of the Balakirev circle of Russian nationalists, Tchaikovsky used a Russian folk tune as one of the two themes in the famous Andante movement. The second theme, played above a cello ostinato, is a Tchaikovskian molto espressivo. Rather than reach any conclusive ending, its calm serenity seems to dissolve into the very atmosphere at the end of the movement. The scherzo quickly brings us back to reality with its clear phrases and sprightly movement. The cello rumbles and double syncopations of the trio are temporary diversions from the piquant grace of the repeated scherzo. A brisk folk-like theme establishes the mood of the final movement, whose structural clarity, crisp textures and movement whirl the quartet to a brilliant close.

Notes by Louise Wrazen

Next Event: University of Toronto Wind Symphony, February 11, 1979
3 p.m. MacMillan Theatre.

Next Orford Quartet Concert: Sunday, March 11, 1979, 3 p.m.
Walter Hall.

THE ORFORD STRING QUARTET

There is little doubt in anyone's mind about the excellence and the musicianship of the Orford String Quartet. Everywhere they go in the world, be it their native Canada, the U.S.A., England, France, the U.S.S.R., Italy, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Rumania, the Netherlands, Sweden, Tunisia, or Peruto Rico, they receive outstanding enthusiasm in the form of applause, standing ovations, and excellent concert reviews. Truly they are Canada's finest string quartet and they rank among the top ten in the world.

The Quartet was established in 1965 when Andrew Dawes, Kenneth Perkins, Terence Helmer, and Marcel St-Cyr met at Les Jeunesses Musicales' summer camp at Mount Orford, Quebec. They took their name from the camp and have since brought added lustre to it. They have been Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Toronto since 1968.